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Cambodia: The government is reacting strongly to the latest incident involving alleged depredations by South Vietnamese troops in Cambodia.

Prime Minister Lon Nol sent two high-ranking officials to brief the US chargé on an ambush of a small Cambodian convoy in Svay Rieng Province, which forms the "parrot's beak," on 21 August by South Vietnamese troops. Three Cambodians, including two officers, were killed. The Cambodians claim that, prior to the ambush, the South Vietnamese unit had swept through the countryside molesting and stealing from Cambodian villagers. The South Vietnamese have apologized for the ambush and have told Cambodian authorities that ten culprits have been arrested, but Phnom Penh has not been appeased.

The chargé was told that incidents of stealing and smuggling occurred daily and that the South Vietnamese were contemptuous of Cambodian authority in the area. The Cambodian officials also stated that Lon Nol is "increasingly fed up" and is even considering sending an armored battalion into the area to "control ARVN." Although the Cambodians apparently did not request any US action, the briefing is evidence of the seriousness with which Lon Nol views the situation.

The continuing misbehavior of South Vietnamese troops is almost certainly becoming an important political liability for Lon Nol, who is held partly responsible for their presence in Cambodia. Even sophisticated Cambodian officials have been appalled by the contrast between the behavior of ARVN and the Vietnamese Communists, who with few exceptions have tried to ingratiate themselves with Cambodian villagers.

For its part, Saigon has taken steps to impose stricter discipline on its forces, who have been behaving better than in the early days of the Cambodian operation. Many of the stories reaching Phnom Penh are probably exaggerated, but the Cambodians are inclined to believe the worst about their allies.

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NOTES

Laos: The government offensive southwest of the Plaine des Jarres has run into stiff enemy opposition. Taking advantage of poor flying weather, elements of the North Vietnamese 174th Regiment have mounted a series of sharp counterattacks against government elements attempting to recapture the base at Ban Na. Additional guerrillas are now pushing into the Ban Na area from the south in an attempt to relieve the pressure. On the political front, there has been no progress in efforts to get talks under way at Khang Khay. [redacted]

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[redacted] the Pathet Lao are upset over the inclusion of prominent rightists in the government's delegation to Khang Khay, arguing that it violates an understanding with Prime Minister Souvanna that participants in the next round of talks will be confined to the neutralists and the Communists. [redacted]

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